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Zerrikania

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> *I saw temples dedicated to the worship of dragons. I heard their voice, almost human, but reverberating with a thousand echoes. I met warrior maids clad in leopard skins, tattooed from head to foot and giving no ground to witchers in mastery of the blade. I saw mages who channeled power from fire. I saw seemingly harmless flies whose solitary bite would make a man fall into a deep slumber, never to awake save to die. In short, Zerrikania is a land where the fantastic is normal, and the impossible occurs daily...*
>
> - *The Wonders of Zerrikania*

Zerrikania	
General Information	
Type of Government	Matriarchal[W] Queendom[1][2]
Ruler	Queen of Zerrikania
Societal Information	
Official language	Zerrikanian dialect
Demonym	Zerrikanian[3] Zerrikan[4][5]
Religion	Dragon cults Niya
Map(s)	
Area	

Zerrikania is a vast human realm located to the east of both the Northern Kingdoms and the Nilfgaardian Empire.[N 1] Isolated from the westerners by mountain ranges, deserts and wastelands, it is often perceived as a mysterious land of warrior women, dragon cults and exotic beasts.

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History

Early history

Roots of the modern Zerrikanian realm are found within a great fertile canyon surrounded by steppes and harsh barren plateaus. People of this lush region believed they had been designated by Zerrikanterment, a colossal golden dragon, as his chosen people[W] destined to guard and take care of dragons visiting the chasm.[1]

While the canyon population is perceived as the mythological birthplace of the culture, the bulk of the Zerrikanian nation was formed by numerous steppe clans. Led by matriarchs, these warlike amazons dominated the areas around,[6] [7] eventually imposing the matriarchal system within the chasm itself and

establishing a monarchy. The traditional protection of dragons turned into worship,[1] with monumental temples hosting these majestic beasts being erected across the realm.[2][8]

Contact with outside world

The continuous shrinking of the number of dragons visiting the realm led Saulrenith, a priestess from one of the northern Zerrikanian cities, to propose an expedition to the Northern Realms in order to search for remaining dragons as well as spread their faith. Six priestesses and six warrioresses spent four years roaming the Continent until they were massacred by a dwarven band hunting for a green dragon. The mission's failure prompted Queen Merineaevelth to found the *Faithel*: a warrior order tasked with finding and protecting the holy creatures.[1]

The failed expedition and establishment of Faithel increased the interest in an outside world by what was once an isolationist country.[1] Holy warriors were followed by traders, alchemists and inventors, introducing previously unknown goods in Nordling and Nilfgaardian lands. Women unaffiliated with any clan, known as Free Warriors, became a common sight in foreign mercenary bands,[7] eventually leading to the situation when any Zerrikanian warrior woman abroad was mistaken to be a Free Warrior.[9]

Prior to the mid-1100s, the Zerrikanian crown came into contact with witchers that were working as caravan defenders across the infamous Korath desert, which the country used regularly to try and trade with the western part of the continent. Sensing a good opportunity here, the Queen of Zerrikania offered a proposal to these witchers to help build up their schools in exchange for their services to esort their caravans across the desert. This lead to the formal creation of the School of the Manticore and a close relationship between the Zerrikanian crown and the witchers formed. However, in the fall of 1146, what became known as the Day of Fire occured: most of the school's witchers were escorting most of the royal family and court to try and arrange a marriage between the queen's son and the Princess of Metinna when they were met by a towering Fire Elemental. By the time the battle was over, almost all of the witchers were killed, half of the royal family, and a third of the court. The Zerrikanians shunned the witchers after this and doubled their efforts to find a safer sea route to the west.[10]

By the second half of the 13th century, trade routes were established and western travelers began to roam Zerrikanian lands, returning with many vague or exaggerated tales.[4][6][8][10]

Dissidents and mercenaries

Steppe guardian

In the second half of the 13th century, the ruling Queen of Zerrikania was a sorceress of bad renown outside her realm. She was forced to rely on foreign mercenaries in chasing dissidents dangerous to her rule. One of them, Borch Three Jackdaws, was in fact a golden dragon himself in secret.[11]

Zerrikania did not partake in the Northern Wars thus making it a destination of refugees, including Sigismund Dijkstra, Isengrim Faoiltiarna, and Boreas Mun.[12] However, the realm suffered its own civil wars, fought over the humid, forested regions.[13] Several mercenary bands looking for a job after the Battle of Brenna,[8][13] including Clan Tuirseach warriors[2] and the famed Kovirian Free Company led by Julia Abatemarco, took part in the conflict. The side supported by mercenaries took heavy loses as the foreigners, unprepared for local dangers, suffered from diseases and predatory fauna. Their native opponents took advantage from familiarity with jungle landscape and succesively won skirmish after skirmish without the mercenaries being able to even locate the enemy. After eight months of war, the foreigners were forced to retreat.[13] The Nordlings who returned home were voluntarily accompanied by Zerrikanian exiles.[8]

Geography and climate

Zerrikania is situated between the Fiery Mountains to the north and Great Korath Desert in the south.[13] It can be reached from the Elskerdeg Pass through the famed Wastelands.[12]

Descending from the mountains, one would first enter the thick, primeval forest, only to eventually cross it and reach dry steppes, deserts and barren plateaus[W] of the Continent's interior. One such plateau is "broken" by a huge canyon up to 3 km deep. The canyon is basically a gigantic oasis hosting a unique microclimate due to its shadow's cooling effect and multiple sources of freshwater, often in form of waterfalls. All of this makes the growth of rainforest possible and provides habitats for several exotic creatures as well as human settlements. The distance from one end of the gorge to the other is 5 days of journey.[1]

Fauna and flora

Zerrikania has two distinct forest systems, one adjacent to the mountains and another down in the canyon. The canyon's rainforests comprise of several plants, some of which are almost impossible to find outside apart from Brokilon Forest. One can encounter exotic trees with large juicy fruits and flowered climber vines as well as plants that are poisonous or otherwise dangerous. Outside the forests, the vegetation is sparse.[1]

The realm hosts a number of unique animals in its varied areas, including tigers,[4] antelopes,[6] ostriches, jackals, snakes,[1] camels, leopards,[14] and colored birds of prey.[2] Monsters that may be encountered include venomous basilisks[4] and spiders so large so they can trap elephants in their webs. One should also be vary of tse tse flies which lay eggs within human bodies.[13]

Society

Demographics

Zerrikanian society is comprised of a number of ethnicities and races. While humans seem to be prevalent,[N 2] the national language is at least partially derived from Elder Speech[6] and existence of dwarves and other nonhumans is not unheard of.[1]

T w o Z e

People are powerfully built, well adapted to harsh environment. Their skin tone ranges from swarthy[15][16] to black,[13][17] and their hair from fair[9] to dark.[17] A common practice involves tattoing bodies;[9] each tattoo follows a code, denoting a specific meaning.[1]

Structure of the society

While not codified by law, the Zerrikanian society is *de facto* matriarchal in nature. By tradition, it's women who hold positions of power – they are clan leaders, priestesses, warriors, and teachers.

Zerrikania is ruled by a Queen, sometimes also translated as Supreme Leader. By default, the position belongs to the inheriting female clan member of the previous Queen. In instances when the successor refuses assuming the position, or when it is hard to determine who should succeed, the new Leader is chosen through popular vote held during People's Assembly: a thing[W]-like folkmoot where each free Zerrikanian woman can submit a candidacy and cast a vote. The person elected starts a new royal line and her descendants inherit the throne once she dies.

Zerrikanian men mostly comprise a caste known as *Worenkenni*. The *Worenkenni* do communal and domestic work, such as land cultivation, mining, woodwork, and fishing. It's men who are tasked with raising children: girls up to 4 and boys up to 10. *Worenkenni* are also teachers of culturally masculine jobs, and sometimes become respected sages.[1]

rrikanians of different backgrounds.

Culture

Language and writing system

The sole official language is Zerrikanian, a heavily distorted dialect of Elder Speech. It's the only one known by all Zerrikania's inhabitants; only priestesses and *Faithel* learn Common or Nilfgaardian.

The written form of Zerrikanian is runic.[1]

Education

As a free Zerrikanian child reaches 4, she or he usually becomes helping parent

of suitable gender in their work. As they reach 10, children become baptised in the name of Zerrikanterment; from now on, they turn from passive observers into active participants of Zerrikanian social life. They choose the job they would like to take care of and learn it for at least five years; each year, they can change the area of studies, but as they reach 15 they are obliged to decide for good. Girls between 10 to 15 are called *Cule* and boys *Laireani*; as they reach 15, they become *Cule mailteini* and *Laireani mailten* respectively, and begin practices in their chosen way of life until they are ready.

Those, who choose the life of warrior or of priestess, have to train longer to become full-fledged members of the profession.[1]

Religion

The only religion recognized by state is cult of Divine Dragons. It comprises of a "pantheon" of various ancient wyrms as well as veneration of real, living specimens hosted in temples.[1][8] Foreigners often speak about the sacrifices performed before the images of these scaled overlords.[9] Notable entities worshipped include Zerrikanterment,[1] Baal-Zebuth, and Raróg.[8]

The position of the state-mandated form of worship is contested by growing cult of Lilit-Niya, a syncretic religion mixing ancient Wozgor beliefs with eastern spirituality. Its matriarchal character swayed many women across the country and the elites, making Zerrikania a true center of the religion.[18]

Magic, alchemy and medicine

Magic in Zerrikania is practiced mostly by priestesses. Becoming one takes eight years, during which adepts learn the arcana of dragon magic, reading and writing Elder Runes, decipher legends and mysteries written in ancient chronicles, and become accustomed with herbalism and alchemy.[1]

Alchemy is one of arts practiced by both women and men. Along with various other recipies, Zerrikanian wizards and sect members became known as specialists in the usage of explosives. Used to create bombs or siege engines, substances developed by Zerrikanian masters were eventually brought to Nilfgaard and Northern Realms during 12th or 13th century.[13][15][10][19]

Zerrikanian knowledge and ingredients find its uses in medicine as well.

Afiresco rpions h

One of the characteristic elements of local practices is acupuncture therapy[W].[2]

Warfare and weapon smithery

Like other steppe nations, Zerrikanians specialize in mounted archery and sabremanship. Their legendary marksmanship skills are the topic of legends and superstitions across the Continent; a common myth amongst those uneducated with bowmanship claims that Zerrikanian amazons cut a single breast in order for it not to interfere with their aim.[6][N 3]

While the renowned *Faithel* order is the most characteristic, most Zerrikanian armed women belong to steppe guardians – clans' retinues protecting borders. These warrioresses train in extremal conditions, learn camouflage and aquire knowledge about plants and animals. They wear two lines of the tattoo and the "chameleon" symbol: two vortexes conjoined in "8" shape tattoed below ears.[1]

Yet another example of Zerrikanian amazons are the Free Warriors: swearing alegiance neither to the clan or the queen, they are often found in mercenary groups of the Continent.[7] Their renown is high; Nordlings seeing *Faithel* often assume they deal with Free Warriors.[9]

Zerrikanians are known for their production of zefhars enforced with antelope horns[6] and saberras, a type of saber native to Zerrikania.[20] The most destructive, however, are fire scorpions: siege engines shooting green fire, a couple of such combined being capable of razing entire cities. Some even say it's these machines that caused the desertification of Zerrikania ages ago.[2]

Economy and trade

In the steppe and the desert, most Zerrikanians are herders, living off the milk and meat their animals produce. In areas with a more favourable climate, the more sedentary lifestyle is possible, allowing a portion of the population to produce goods other than basic foods.[1]

ootingprojectilesofZerrikanianFire

AZerrikan

Most of the Continent knows Zerrikania only through the products imported from there; it is hard to determine however which ones are produced in Zerrikania, and which ones are merely sold by Zerrikanian traders after being bought in even farther lands. Some of the wares commonly associated with Zerrikania are spices[2] and silk.[10][21] They arrive in Northern Realms either via land route through Elskerdeg Pass and Aedirn,[12][11] or by sea, presumably from ports in Nilfgaardian Empire or in the lands south of the Korath.[6]

One of the biggest importers from Zerrikania is the Nordling-owned Zerrikanian Spice Company, headquartered in Novigrad where ships with Zerrikanian products often dock.[2] Some northern organizations even have branches in Zerrikania itself, with Bank of Cianfanelli family being one of the most prestigious.[14]

Notable Zerrikanians

Rulers

- Merineaevelth[1]

Others

- Téa
- Véa
- Myrgot[22]
- Saulrenith[1]
- Bart[2]
- Azar Javed[23]
- Xaelab[8]

Known locations

- Cianfanelli Bank branch[10]

The Witcher

Zerrikania is not visited in the game, but it is acknowledged as the home

ian Faithel with her sword

Logo of Zerrikanian Spice Company

for the formulae of bombs, and famous for its alchemists.

"Zerrikania, home of the venomous Basilisk, has given birth to other equally hideous creatures. Among them are spotted spiders so huge that they trap elephants in their webs and the no-less terrifying tse tse flies. The flies are especially repulsive, laying their eggs in the human body, the resulting larvae maturing within the host's head. The victim's brain serves as sustenance and when the larvae turn into adult flies, they leave the body through the eye sockets, now void of the previously devoured eyes."

Source

- Foreign Lands
- Zerrikanian Insects and Other Vermin
- Gardener

Trivia

- The way Zerrikanians are described in Sapkowski's books is reminiscent of Scythians[W] and adjacent cultures[W], the Iranian nomads of ancient Eurasian steppe. They were at least partially egalitarian society knowns for tattoed horse warriors; female Scythian warriors are thought to be the source of mythical Greek Amazons[W].
- Both CD PROJEKT RED and Netflix[W] took other sources of inspiration in addition to Iranic Scythia. In *The Witcher*, while Azar Javed bears a Persian name, he is of Arabian or African ethnicity; animals mentioned in game such as tse-tse flies and elephants are characteristic to Africa, whereas the Gardener's tale about war alludes to experiences of American soldiers during Vietnam War[W]. In Netflix's *The Witcher*, Téa and Véa wield swords combining Congolese[W] and Graeco-Roman features.

a n w a rr io r w o m a n

Notes

- If Geralt doesn't invite Letho to Kaer Morhen at the end of *Ghosts of the Past*, the latter says that he will flee there.
- A free DLC called Alternative look for Ciri depicts an armor from Zerrikania. [24]

Gallery

Concept art of an unknown Zerrikanian character for The Witcher 2

Footnotes

1. ↑ While The AS Alphabet, a collection of author's notes, describes it as located in Far South, he later described it as located in the East, in *The Lady of the Lake*.

2. ↑ It should be noted that we know virtually nothing about cultural minorities in Zerrikania, both human and nonhuman. Sources describe either the mainstream Zerrikanian culture or just mention Zerrikania in passing; there is no official source on cultural and racial minorities.
3. ↑ Needless to say, the legend is false. As Milva explains in *Baptism of Fire*, "You pull the string to your ear and not your breast".

References

1. ↑ 1.00 1.01 1.02 1.03 1.04 1.05 1.06 1.07 1.08 1.09 1.10 1.11 1.12 1.13 1.14 1.15 1.16 1.17 1.18 1.19 *Wiedźmin: Gra Wyobraźni*
2. ↑ 2.0 2.1 2.2 2.3 2.4 2.5 2.6 2.7 2.8 *The Witcher 3: Wild Hunt*
3. ↑ Consistent throughout books and games
4. ↑ 4.0 4.1 4.2 4.3 *Time of Contempt*
5. ↑ *The Witcher: Versus*
6. ↑ 6.0 6.1 6.2 6.3 6.4 6.5 6.6 *Baptism of Fire*
7. ↑ 7.0 7.1 7.2 *The World of the Witcher*
8. ↑ 8.0 8.1 8.2 8.3 8.4 8.5 8.6 *Szpony i kły*
9. ↑ 9.0 9.1 9.2 9.3 9.4 *Sword of Destiny*
10. ↑ 10.0 10.1 10.2 10.3 10.4 *The Witcher Role-Playing Game*
11. ↑ 11.0 11.1 *Thronebreaker: The Witcher Tales*
12. ↑ 12.0 12.1 12.2 *The Lady of the Lake*
13. ↑ 13.0 13.1 13.2 13.3 13.4 13.5 13.6 *The Witcher*
14. ↑ 14.0 14.1 *Blood and Wine* expansion
15. ↑ 15.0 15.1 *The Witcher 2: Assassins of Kings*
16. ↑ *The Hexer*
17. ↑ 17.0 17.1 Netflix's *The Witcher*
18. ↑ 2nd Edition of *Wiedźmin: Gra Wyobraźni*
19. ↑ *Gwent: The Witcher Card Game*
20. ↑ *The Tower of the Swallow*
21. ↑ *Tales from the world of The Witcher*
22. ↑ *Granica możliwości*
23. ↑ *The Witcher*
24. ↑ Marcin Momot: "Yes. It's Ciri's Zerrikanian outfit."

External links

- Official article on Zerrikania written by Martyna "Sara" Tomaszewska for *Wiedźmin: Gra Wyobraźni* RPG (Polish)

Countries and regions in *The Witcher*	
Northern Kingdoms	Aedirn (Dol Blathanna • Lower Aedirn • Upper Aedirn) • Brokilon • Cidaris (Bremervoord) • Cintra (Attre • Erlenwald • Strept) • Hengfors League (Barefield • Caingorn • Carnedd • Creyden • Crinfrid • Hengfors • Malleore • Tammerfors) • Kaedwen (Lakeland March • Lower March • Upper March • Western March • Hertch • Vespaden) • Kovir and Poviss (Creyden • Kovir • Narok • Poviss • Talgar • Velhad) • Lyria and Rivia (Lyria • Rivia) • Redania (Arcsea • Gelibol • Novigrad • Riverside • Yamurlak) • Skellige (An Skellig • Ard Skellig • Faroe • Hindarsfjall • Spikeroog • Undvik) • Temeria (Angren • Brugge • Ellander • Mahakam • Maribor • Pontaria • Sodden • Transriver • Velen) • Saskia's Free State • Verden
Nilfgaardian Empire	Cintra (Attre • Erlenwald • Strept) • Daerlan • Ebbing (Neveugen • Salm • Venendal) • Etolia • Gemmera • Geso • Lower Alba • Mag Turga (Sudduth) • Magne • Metinna (Metinna • Maecht • Mag Deira) • Nazair • Rowan • Ruach • Slopes • Toussaint • Vicovaro • Winneburg • Ymlac
Eastern Lands	Hakland • Korath desert • Wastelands • **Zerrikania**
Far South	Barsa • Hannu • Melukka • Ofir • Zangvebar
Western Continent	Eastern Coast (Fabiola • Silk Islands)
Former Regions	Emblonia • Kerack • Upper Sodden • Lower Sodden

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by the code developer.